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AUTHOR Friend, Anna Christine
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ABSTRACT

A study attempted to determine how students in literature-based reading programs compare to students in basal-based, skill-oriented reading programs in terms of their interest in reading. The study was carried out on a sample of 215 pupils in 9 third and fifth grade classrooms from school districts in Eastern Kansas and Northeastern Oklahoma. Students' attitudes toward school were measured with the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, a standardized, self-report, paper and pencil test normed on students in grades 1-6. There are 20 items on the survey which constitute the total reading score. Results showed that posttest scores were in all cases below pretest scores, probably because reading interest tends to drop off toward the end of the school year. In both third and fifth grades, scores on the posttest, while lower than the pretest, were still higher in classes using the literature-based approach than in those using the skills-based approach. Generally, fifth graders scored lower than third graders on the reading attitude tests. Further, results from this study suggest the literature-based approach is especially important for males, particularly those in fifth grade. (Contains 2 figures, a table of data, and 33 references.) (TB)

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Running Head: THE EFFECT OF A LITERATURE-BASED APPROACH

THE EFFECT OF A LITERATURE-BASED APPROACH ON THE READING ATTITUDES OF MALE STUDENTS IN THE THIRD AND FIFTH GRADES

Anna Christine Friend
Pittsburg State University
Pittsburg, Kansas

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the reading attitudes of third and fifth grade male students who participated in a literature-based and skills-based reading program. The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey was administered on two occasions (fall and spring) to determine attitudinal differences among the two groups. Results of the study indicated there was no main effect for type of instruction. Third grade males showed no preference for a reading program, while fifth grade males showed a slight preference for a literature-based reading program. Both third and fifth graders, male and females, showed a slight preference for a literature-based reading program. Also, data obtained showed a main effect existed for gender which indicated females had more positive attitudes towards reading than males despite the type of instruction used.

THE EFFECT OF A LITERATURE-BASED APPROACH ON THE READING ATTITUDES OF MALE STUDENTS IN THE THIRD AND FIFTH GRADES

A recent trend in educational strategies has been the whole language approach to teaching. Whole language is based on the socio-psycholinguistic theory that reading is learned in context (Anderson, 1984). Bergeron (1990) best defines whole language as "a concept that embodies a philosophy of language development as well as the instructional approaches embedded within, and supportive of, that philosophy. This concept includes the use of real literature and writing in the context of meaningful, functional, and cooperative experiences in order to develop in students motivation and interest in the process of learning."

Whole language uses an integrative process that teaches language with all reading systems/skills intact. Children learn to respond to literature across all areas of the curriculum, while developing naturally their own rules for the sound and syntactical systems of language (Goodman, 1989). In a whole language approach, students are encouraged to use their own experiences and knowledge to comprehend literature instead of distracting them from the context with decoding skills (Shapiro & Riley, 1989; Watson, 1989).

An aspect of the whole language approach is to center reading and reading activities around children's literature books. Literature-based reading instruction involves the use of literature instead of textbooks in the teaching of reading, and utilizes combinations of teacher and student interactions with the selection so the student will develop into a thoughtful and proficient reader (Giddings, 1990). A holistic literature-based classroom eliminates the structural support and practice of basal reading systems and uses children's trade books as the cornerstone of the reading program (Giddings, 1990). The theoretical base for a literature-based reading program focuses largely on the whole language philosophy (Giddings, 1990). For the purpose of this study, whole language and literature-based reading instruction will be used interchangeably in discussing this methodology of reading.

Since the emergence of the whole language approach, a debate between skills-based and holistic approaches has surfaced. The research suggests that classrooms with rich language and

concept environments fail to provide direct instruction in the application of decoding skills (Heymsfeld, 1989; Schickedanz, 1990; Shapiro & Riley, 1989). Shapiro and Riley (1989) described the debate between the two as "the necessity for students to master skills before integration versus the students' use of their personal knowledge and concepts to assist in their comprehension of material."

The skills-based approach is one of the most common approaches to teaching reading in U. S. classrooms. A skills-based approach uses basal textbooks, worksheets, drills, and phonics for instruction. Instructional programs in the U.S. focus on "essential" reading skills, despite the fact these skills have no demonstratable relationship to learning how to read books (Bussis, 1982). Often instruction in reading focuses on the practice of reading skills for an undefined purpose and children begin to see these tasks as tedious and lacking a connection to life beyond the classroom (Hiebert & Colt, 1989).

Surveys indicate more than 90% of teachers use basals to teach reading and some states require the use of basals (Gursky, 1991). Advocates of literature-based reading instruction believe basal readers often create artificial language and mar the use of literature by gearing it to skill development (Giddings, 1990). It is interesting to note that Holland and Hall (1989) could not find two basal readers that present reading skills in the same sequence, which suggests no particular skills sequence is necessary for learning to read.

Although basal readers have improved, the new basal selections are not necessarily more interesting than the old basals (McCarthy, et al., 1994). Most textbooks printed after 1990 have less adapted literature and vocabulary control and repetition is reduced, however, skills are still taught in a prescribed sequence (O'Neil, 1994). In a survey of 178 Australian students, Cairney (1988) found student perceptions of reading associated with basals were negative. "Children do not see meaning as important when reading basals, and they do not find basals intrinsically interesting" (Cairney, 1985). Research by Taylor, Frye, and Gaetz (1990) based on performance on skill pretests suggest many elementary students may be able to skip approximately 70-90% of the skill activities in the basal reader in which they are placed for instruction.

Research comparing the use of basals to the use of trade books in classrooms tends to favor authentic literature for student achievement and positive attitudes. In a study by Bader et al. (1987), the researchers found that second grade students using literature books showed more

improvement in reading and more student interest than those using basals. A quantitative study on research comparing whole language to basal readers found whole language and basals were equal in their effects on achievement with these exceptions: whole language is more effective in kindergarten, and it is most effective for teaching the functional aspects of reading (i.e., print concepts and expectations) than at mastering word recognition skills (Stahl & Miller, 1989).

In her review of literature on child development and reading styles, Carbo (1987) indicates that young boys may be at a greater risk in reading programs with a strong emphasis on listening, worksheets, and phonics because they tend to have less-well developed auditory and verbal skills and tend to learn through kinesthetic activities (Carbo, 1987). Research by Eiszler (1982) indicates fifth and sixth grade male students prefer tactile and kinesthetic styles of learning with less preference for teacher direction. Research on brain dominance (Sinatra, 1983) found male readers and poor readers were strong in right hemisphere functioning, which is the holistic and nonverbal sphere of information in the brain. The holistic approach provides for students with all learning styles because it teaches a whole to part relationship and relies on hands-on activities. For this reason, many researchers (Carbo, 1987; Catoe, 1992; Reiff, 1992; Sinatra, 1983) recommend the use of a holistic approach to reading.

Studies have also been conducted on the effectiveness of reading and writing achievement in a holistic approach. Varble (1990) analyzed the writing samples of second graders and sixth graders taught by teachers with the whole language or skills-based approaches. The criteria of correctness was dependent upon the quality of the content and the mastery of mechanics. Varble (1990) found no difference between the sixth grade students' writing samples; however, second grade students taught with a whole language approach had writing samples with better meaning and content but there was no difference in the use of mechanics between the students taught with the different approaches. In a study of first grade students, Holland and Hall (1989) found no significant difference in reading achievement between classes taught with a basal reader or a whole language approach. However, students taught with a whole language approach enjoyed reading and participated more in class than students taught with a basal. A study conducted by personnel in Franklin County School District, Meadville, Mississippi (1993) found reading achievement for first and second grade students in a whole language classroom well exceeded the national averages for reading. These students also reported the most positive attitudes towards their teachers.

Reutzel and Cooter (1990) also measured first grade reading achievement between basal readers and whole language and found a significant difference in a holistic approach over basal readers in total reading scores, and in vocabulary and comprehension subtests.

In gender studies regarding reading instruction, Closer and Pearman (1992) administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey developed by McKenna and Kear (1992) to grades 1-6. Closer and Pearman (1992) found there were no significant differences between the recreational reading attitudes nor the academic reading attitudes of boys and girls in grades 1-3. However, the attitudes of girls towards academic reading in grades 4-6 were significantly lower than their recreational reading attitudes. Additionally, boys in grades 4-6 dropped significantly in both recreational and academic reading as compared to boys in grades 1-3. A review of the literature by Sheridan and Fizdale (1981) revealed children early in their school careers learn reading is closely identified with the female role. In a study on sex-role appropriateness on students in grades K-2, Shapiro (1990) found half of the boys and girls near the end of kindergarten viewed reading and writing as a sex-role appropriate activity. Additionally, Shapiro (1990) noted boys at the end of first grade increasingly viewed reading and writing as feminine, and by second grade nearly all boys viewed writing as a feminine activity.

"The attitudes of learners is crucially important to the outcomes from their work" (Howard, 1988). Attitudes towards school develop early, and the elementary years are important in developing good readers (Howard, 1988). Research by psychologist Benjamin Bloom (1976) found students' perception of success or failure in school learning tasks should result in favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards school and school learning. Further, Bloom (1976) noted the positive relation between affect toward school and school achievement.

As the research has shown, many studies have focused on the reading achievement of primary students using a whole language, literature-based approach. However, few studies have analyzed reading attitudes in relation to male students. This study focused on the comparison between the reading attitudes of male students who were educated in a whole language environment to the reading attitudes of males who were educated in a skills-based environment. This study also compared the reading attitudes of males to females within the same grade and learning environment.

METHOD:

Subjects

This research study was carried out on a sample of 215 pupils in nine classrooms from school districts in Eastern Kansas and Northeastern Oklahoma. Four classrooms from fifth grade and five classrooms from third grade were chosen. All fifth grade classes were located in Miami, Oklahoma Public School District. Three of the third grade classes were located in Baxter Springs, Kansas Public School District, while the other two third grade classes were located in DeSoto, Kansas Public School District. The classrooms had an average of 24 students with approximately half of the students being male. The classrooms chosen for this study were selected on the building principals' evaluations of the teaching method used by each teacher, and were validated by thirty minute classroom observations conducted by the researcher. There was no random selection for this sample, as the classes in the schools were already determined prior to the beginning of the study.

Design

A quasi-experimental study was conducted using these students. One independent variable was whether or not a literature-based reading approach was used as the method for reading instruction. Literature-based reading instruction is defined as a method of instruction that actively involves students in the reading process while teaching them to respond to literature across the curriculum. This literature-based approach took place in the form of reading instruction and activities. The dependent variable was the students' attitude towards reading. Students' attitudes towards reading was measured with the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990).

A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design was used for each grade level tested. Raw scores for each student was utilized in the analyses. Mixed repeated measures analyses of covariance were computed to determine main effects and interaction effects of the independent variables and covariate. The ANCOVA design was a four-way treatment structure with three dependent variables. Males and females represented the two levels of 'gender'. Instruction with literature-based reading approach and instruction without literature-based reading approach represented the two levels of 'instruction'. The two levels of 'grade' represented third and fifth

grades. Pretest and posttest represented the two levels of 'time of testing'. The dependent variables were the raw scores on the attitude measurement, scores from the two subtests and a total reading score. The covariate was the students' group achievement scores taken from the spring of the previous school year. The total reading national percentile rank scores from a standardized achievement test were used in the analyses. Scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were utilized for the third grade students, and the Metropolitan Achievement Test - 7 scores were utilized for fifth grade students.

Instrumentation

Students' attitudes toward school were measured with the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey. The survey is a standardized, self-report, paper and pencil test normed on students in grades 1-6. There are twenty items on the survey which constitute the total reading score. The first ten items represent the recreational reading score, the final ten items represent the academic reading score. Pretest and posttest data were reported as raw scores. This assessment instrument is supported by numerous validity and reliability studies (McKenna & Kear, 1990). The test was group administered by the researcher. Fifth grade classrooms were pretested in October and posttested in April. The third grade classrooms were pretested in November and posttested in May. There was a time spread of six months between the pretest and posttest. Teacher involvement was minimal.

Procedures

Instruction remained the same throughout the duration of the study with two classes from each grade level, third and fifth grades, receiving reading instruction using the literature-based approach. The other classes from each grade level received skills-based reading instruction using a basal reader as adopted by the individual school districts.

Reading instruction with the literature-based approach focused on active reading and hands-on, discovery learning using real literature books. Reading lessons in all classrooms involved whole group instruction with one selected literature book, such as Sign of the Beaver or Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes. In each of the literature-based classrooms, the researcher observed many cooperative group activities, writing activities, and thematic units that crossed into other

areas of the curriculum. The researcher also noted more teacher involvement and interaction with the students. Each classroom met the criteria for "characteristics of a literature-based classroom" checklist developed by the researcher.

Classes without the literature-based reading approach had reading instruction that focused on basal reading skills, phonics instruction, and direct, teacher instruction. Materials used in these classrooms included Hooked on Phonics, SRA reading series, and a 1991 Harcourt Brace & Janovich basal reading series. The researcher observed "round robin" reading, worksheets and workbook activities, vocabulary instruction, and word attack skills. The researcher noted students were encouraged to "sound out" words when reading aloud. Each classroom met the criteria for "characteristics of a skills-based classroom" checklist developed by the researcher.

At the beginning and end of the school year, all groups were administered a survey measuring reading attitudes. The researcher administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey to all classrooms in a whole group format. Children were guaranteed anonymity and identified their gender with a "B" or "G" and a number at the top of their attitude survey. The researcher emphasized this was not a test and there were no "right" answers. All four Garfields were discussed in a group format before beginning the survey. Students were encouraged to circle the Garfield that matched their feelings, not as Garfield might respond. Each item was read aloud to the students by the researcher. For example, questions asked on the survey were "How do you feel about going to a bookstore?" and "How do you feel when the teacher asks you questions about what you read?" This same procedure was followed for both pretest and posttest.

RESULTS

The dependent variables in the following analyses were the total reading attitude scores and the scores on the two subtests, recreational and academic reading attitude. These scores were entered into three separate 2 (Grade) x 2 (Gender) x 2 (Type of Instruction) x 2 (Time of Testing) repeated measures analyses of covariance, with repeated measures on time of testing (fall and spring testing) and with standardized achievement test scores as the covariate.

The results with the total reading attitude scores indicated that there were main effects of grade, $\underline{F}$ (1, 143) = 24..50, $\underline{p} < .0001$, gender, $\underline{F}$ (1, 143) = 12.81, $\underline{p} < .0005$, and time of testing, $\underline{F}$ (1, 143) = 4.23, $\underline{p} < .04$, and an interaction of grade and time of testing, $\underline{F}$ (1, 143) = 15.24, $\underline{p} <$

.0001. As can be seen in Figure 1, females had higher total reading attitude scores than males.

[Insert Figure 1]

Inspection of Figure 2 reveals the interaction of grade and time of testing was due to the fifth-grade students' posttest total reading attitude scores being significantly lower than their pretest scores and significantly lower than third graders posttest scores, which were only slightly lower than their pretest scores. It can also be seen that the two types of instruction had nearly identical changes from their pretest to their posttest scores, with the exception of fifth grade skills-based which dropped significantly more than the other three groups (see Figure 2).

[Insert Figure 2]

The results from the recreational subtest scores indicated there were main effects of gender, F (1, 143) = 13.32, $p < .0001$, grade, F (1, 143) = 28.01, $p < .0001$, instruction, F (1, 143) = 4.07, $p < .045$, and time of testing, F (1, 143) = 4.49, $p < .035$. Results also indicated interaction effects of Time of Testing x Grade, F (1, 143) = 19.91, $p < .0001$, and Grade x Type of Instruction x Time of Testing, F (1, 143) = 5.06, $p < .026$.

The interaction of grade and time of testing was due to the fifth grade posttest recreational reading attitude scores being significantly lower than their pretest scores and were significantly lower than the third graders posttest scores, which were only slightly lower than their pretest scores. Further inspection of Figure 3 also reveals the interaction of grade and type of instruction and time of testing was due to the fifth grade skills-based posttest recreational reading attitude scores being significantly lower than their posttest scores, as well as being significantly lower than the fifth grade literature-based posttest scores. It can also be seen that the third grade skills-based group's scores remained constant from pretest to posttest (See Figure 3).

[Insert Figure 3]

Data obtained from the academic subtests scores revealed there were main effects of grade, F (1, 143) = 15.75, $p < .0001$, and gender, F (1, 143) = 7.76, $p < .006$, and interactions of Grade x Type of Instruction, F (1, 143) = 4.83, $p < .029$, and Grade x Time of Testing, F (1, 143) = 6.73, $p < .01$.

The interaction of grade and time of testing was due to the fifth grade students' posttest academic reading attitude scores being significantly lower than their pretest scores and significantly lower than the third graders posttest scores, which was only slightly lower than their pretest

scores. The interaction of grade and type of instruction was due to the significantly lower posttest scores in the fifth grade skills-based group as compared to their pretest scores. The literature-based groups had nearly identical changes from their pretest to their posttest scores in both third and fifth grades.

To distinguish which mean scores of reading attitudes were significantly different, contrasts [Scheffe tests (Hurford, n.d.)] involving the mean pretest and posttest scores for each group were performed. As indicated in Table I, the difference between all pretest scores, total and both subtests, for all groups were not statistically significant. However, significant differences existed between the third grade and fifth grade groups on the recreational reading attitude subtest and the total reading attitude scores (see Table I). These differences indicate third graders have more positive attitudes towards reading than fifth graders. A statistical difference also existed between the third grade literature-based group and both fifth grade groups on the academic reading attitude subtest, indicating fifth graders have poorer attitudes towards reading than third graders taught in a literature-based classroom (see Table I).

[Insert Table I]

CONCLUSIONS

There is a growing movement towards the use of whole language or literature-based methodologies in American classrooms. Proponents of whole language believe using holistic strategies in the classroom will produce "lifelong" readers. In whole language classrooms, the focus is on the process of reading as a whole as well as on comprehending literature.

The literature suggests male students would prefer learning in a whole language environment because teaching strategies would favor kinesthetic and tactile learning styles. Additionally, whole language advocates contend their strategies improve students' attitudes towards reading.

This study attempted to determine whether third or fifth grade male students preferred literature-based or skills-based reading programs by measuring their attitude towards reading. Preferences between genders were also determined by a reading attitude survey.

Females in both grades showed more positive attitudes towards reading than males in both subtests, academic and recreational reading, as well as on total reading attitude scores. Third grade female students in literature-based reading programs had the most positive attitudes towards

reading, while fifth grade male students tended to have the least positive attitudes towards reading. One explanation for these results might be third and fifth grade students view reading as a sex-appropriate role and as students grow older males view reading as a more feminine activity.

The time of testing from pretest and posttest showed a significant difference on the total reading attitude scores, as well as on the subtests. In all classes, reading attitude scores dropped from pretest to posttest. As one may expect, attitude scores towards reading declined as the end of the school year approached. This may be due to the fact that students began to lose interest in school by April and May because the end of the school year was near.

Overall, the third grade literature-based classrooms had the most positive attitudes towards reading, although their reading attitudes scores dropped slightly from pretest to posttest. The third grade skills-based classes also dropped slightly from pretest to posttest on total reading attitude and academic reading, but the scores remained constant from pretest to posttest on the recreational reading subtest. Again, the drop in scores from pretest to posttest may be due to the lack of interest in school at the end of the school year. As a whole, third graders in both groups had more positive attitudes towards reading than fifth graders. This might suggest that third grade students enjoy reading more because reading and literature is still "new".

Fifth graders had lower reading attitudes than third graders. Fifth graders in the literature-based classroom, however, had slightly better attitudes towards reading than the fifth grade skills-based classes. Initially, the fifth grade skills-based group started the school year with more positive attitudes towards reading than the fifth grade literature-based group. By the end of the school year, the fifth grade skills-based group's attitude toward reading dropped significantly below their pretest scores, as well as dropping significantly below the fifth grade literature-based scores. These results indicate fifth graders show a lack of interest in reading in comparison to third graders. However, fifth graders seem to have more positive attitudes when taught in a literature-based reading program than those students taught in a skills-based program. This data may suggest fifth graders lack interest in continued repetition of reading skills, but prefer the use of "real" literature used in meaningful context. Fifth graders may prefer to have the opportunity to select literature according to their interests, such as those methods practiced in literature-based classrooms.

In summary, data from this study seems to indicate a preference to the use of a literature-based

reading program in third and fifth grades to improve reading attitudes. Further, this study recommends the use of literature-based reading programs with males in fifth grades to improve attitudes towards reading.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

It is evident, by the literature, that past research has not addressed the effect of whole language practices in intermediate grade classes. As whole language continues to increase in popularity in American schools, its effects on reading attitudes and reading abilities in intermediate grades need to be measured. Additional research focusing on reading achievement in the intermediate grades should be done to determine if the use of whole language improves students' reading ability.

It is recommended this same type of research as conducted in this study should be duplicated using teachers' attitudes towards reading. A comparison of the teachers' attitude towards reading in different reading programs would be of value in determining the effect their attitudes had on influencing students' reading attitudes in their classroom.

Another recommendation for future research would be to study whether or not the teaching style or the reading program influences students' attitudes towards reading. From researcher observation, teachers in the literature-based classrooms tended to have similar teaching styles to each other; while teachers in the skills-based classrooms also had teaching styles similar to each other. Perhaps teachers with similar teaching styles prefer certain reading programs; therefore, it could be possible students show a preference to teaching styles instead of reading programs.

Further research should also be conducted to control for the variable of prior reading instruction in earlier grades and its effect on reading attitudes. Studies measuring reading attitudes in entire schools that practice literature-based or skills-based reading philosophies could be used for subjects, testing students in each grade. Longitudinal single-subject studies using a female and a male subject in literature-based or skills-based schools could be used to measure reading attitudes across several grade levels.

The data from this study showed that females had more positive attitudes towards reading than males, and that third graders had more positive attitudes towards reading than fifth graders. Data also indicated third grade females showed a significant preference for a literature-based reading program. Additionally, fifth graders had less positive attitudes towards reading when a skills-

based reading program was used in reading instruction. It would be of value to extend this study to determine if the classroom teachers' attitudes towards reading had any influence on their students' reading attitudes.

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Figure 1. Total Reading Scores

Main Effects

By Gender

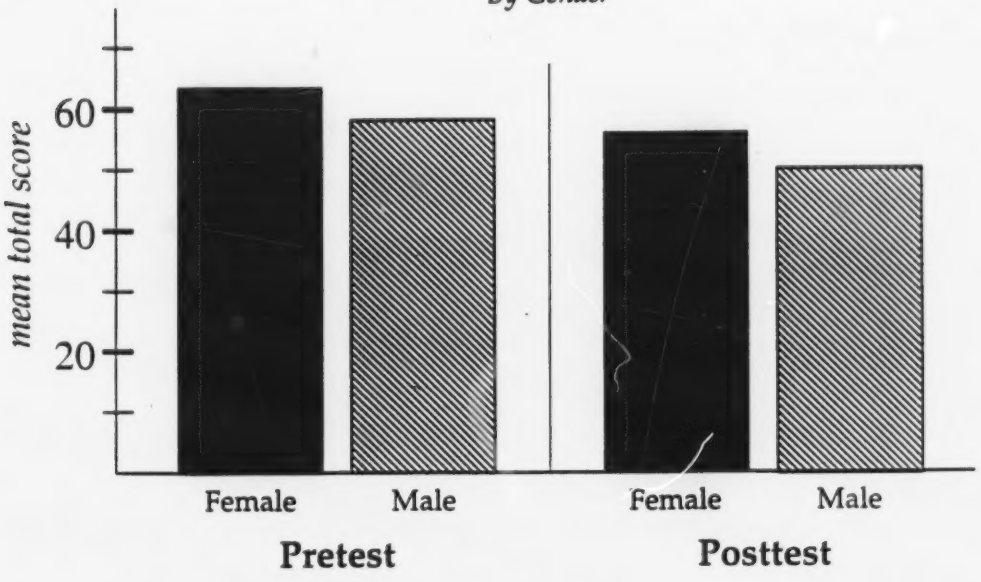

Figure 2. Total Reading Scores

Interaction Effects

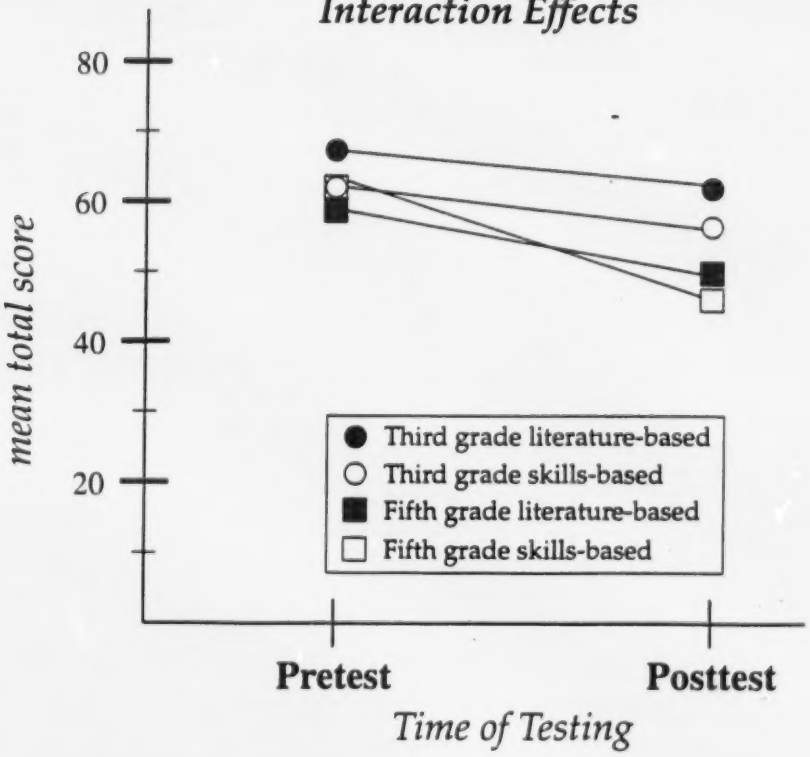

Figure 3. Recreational Reading Scores

Interaction Effects

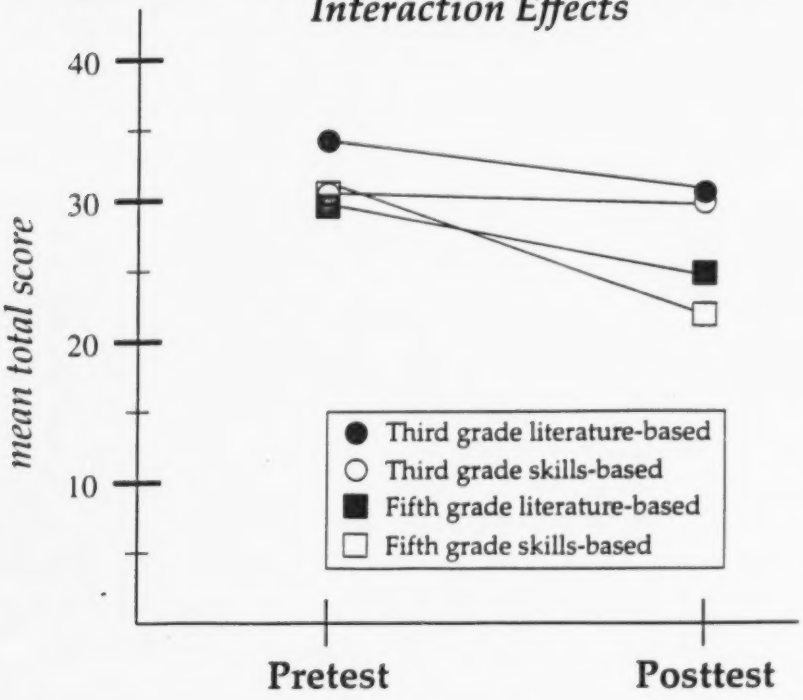

Table I. Scheffé Post-Hoc

	Grade			
	Third		Fifth	
Comparison	*Literature*	*Skills*	*Literature*	*Skills*
Pre-Recreational	34.2	31.4	30.4	31.1
Post-Recreational	31.6	29.8	25.3	22.1
Pre-Academic	33.2	30.3	28.5	30.7
Post Academic	30.4	27.4	23.6	23.7
Pre-Total	67.0	61.7	58.9	61.8
Post-Total	62.0	57.3	49.1	45.9

Note: All mean scores underlined indicate a nonsignificant difference between mean scores.